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CURRENT SUPPORT BRIEF

SECOND EAST-WEST RAILWAY LINK UNDER CONSTRUCTION
IN NORTH KOREA

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND REPORTS

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IN NORTH KOREA**

A second rail line to link the east coast of North Korea with the west coast is under construction. When completed, this new line will open the central mountainous area to further economic development and will provide a strategic route for military support to the rear and central areas of the Demilitarized Military Zone. 1/

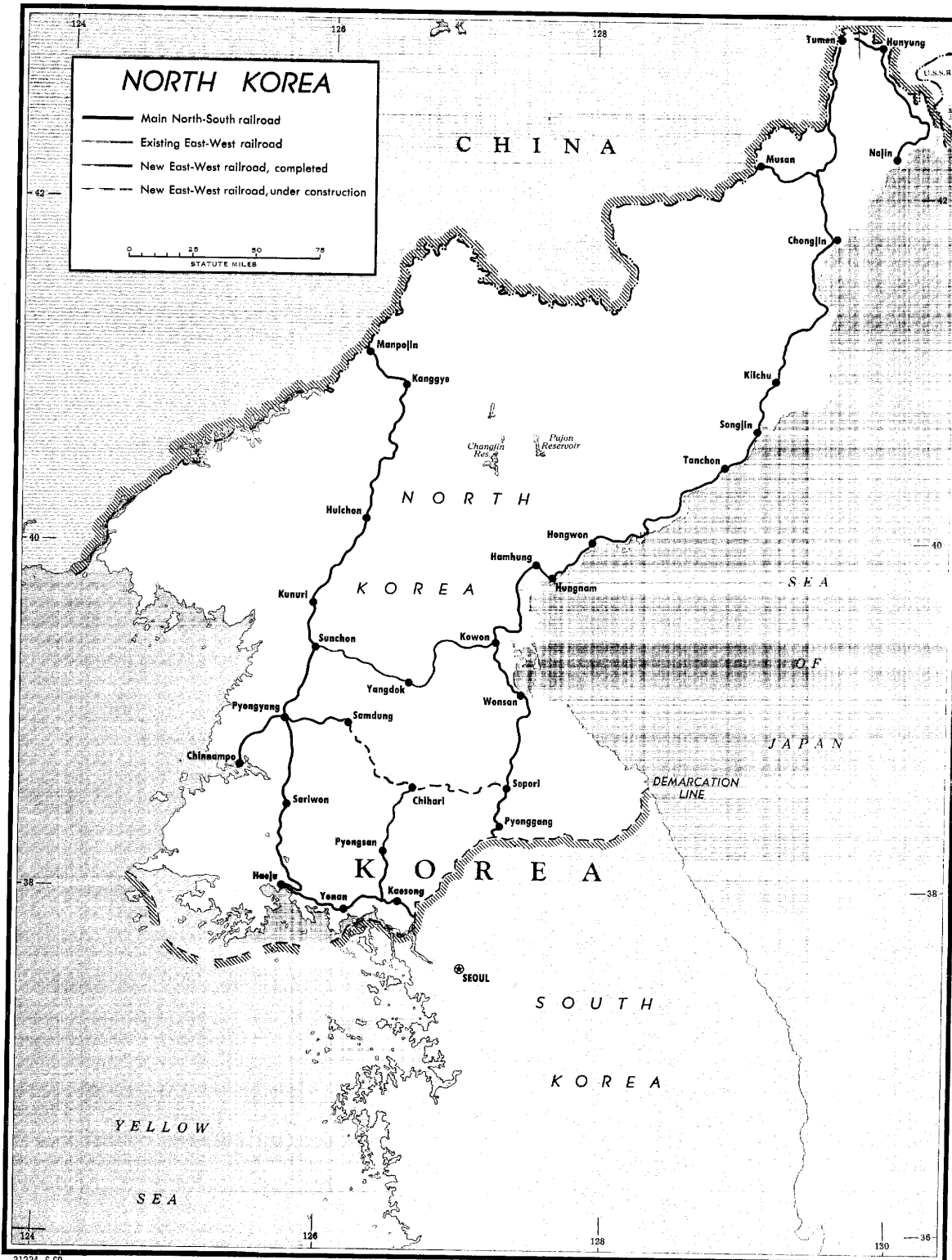
Historically, the railway network in North Korea was developed by Japan and was designed primarily to serve Japanese strategic interests by providing the shortest and most convenient routes to the Manchurian and Russian frontiers. There were two principal arteries--one through the Northwest to the Manchurian border, and the other leading northeast along the coast of the Sea of Japan to the Manchurian and Russian borders. 2/ These two arteries converged at Seoul to form the main east-west rail link. This link was severed at the 38th parallel by the partition of the country, and presently there is only one rail line in North Korea connecting the two coasts. This is the P'yongyang-Wonsan Line, a vitally important line for support of the civilian economy as well as for the deployment and logistic support of the North Korean armed forces.

A second east-west link was started during the early part of 1959 and has been partially completed. This new line is a standard gauge single-tracked system located about half-way between the South Korean border and the existing east-west link. The plan is to connect P'yongson with Chiha-ri and Chiha-ri with Sep'o-ri and Samdŏng. 3/ The only section reported to be in operation is the 60 kilometer stretch from P'yongson to Chiha-ri. Work on the second and most difficult section, from Chiha-ri to Sep'o-ri, is presently under construction. This section, 90 kilometers long will require a great deal more work than the first stage as the terrain is mountainous and extremely rugged. Many tunnels and bridges must be constructed, and thousands of meters of retaining walls will be needed to prevent landslides. 4/ The remaining section of the new route, 179 kilometers from Samdŏng to Chiha-ri, is under construction, but the rate of progress is not known.

The original plan called for the entire system to be in operation by the end of 1960, but it is unlikely that this schedule will be met before 1961. The earlier completion of the first section, however, has already partially linked the South-central area with the main rail network.

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